

BELGIUM

November 5th, 1993

The Bulletin - Newsweekly



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ARISE

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Continued

Pleasure, according to British professor David Warburton, is good for you. A founding member of Arise (Associates for Research in Substance Enjoyment), Warburton gave a workshop in Brussels last month that focused on the contribution of everyday pleasures – smoking, drinking tea, coffee and alcohol, eating chocolate – to the quality of life. Participants included doctors, psychologists, sociologists, psychopharmacologists, and experts in the field of ethics.

Warburton, director of the human psychopharmacology department at



Warburton, hedonistic

"No one would argue that smoking is safe, but there are benefits. It can help people relax, enhance performance at work and help concentration and memory. Of course there are strong reasons for disliking it and smokers should always be courteous." Warburton believes few people dare talk about the benefits of nicotine, even though it is a medical debate. He refers to a recent article in the *New Scientist* on the preventive effect nicotine can have against Parkinson's disease.

Arise does not advocate over-indulgence, however. "We believe in moderate hedonism," Warburton insists. The name of the group deliberately reflects his belief that it is high time to resist "the Calvinistic attacks on people who are obtaining pleasure from legal substances, and on their freedom or choice to do so."

One of his main arguments is that health promotion campaigns tend to be

negative and to treat people as if they were incapable of looking after themselves, or making rational choices. "People get the wrong message. Health education should present many different points of view."

Arise claims to be an independent association of scientists and independent commentators who make a clear distinction between health promotion and health education. Warburton says health promotion campaigns that advocate the use of artificial sweeteners, butter substitutes, nicotine replacements and the like are as closely linked to money-making industries as tobacco and alcohol advertisers are. He openly acknowledges that the Philip Morris tobacco company is one of the group's supporters. "Our sponsors have no influence on the work we do."

Besides, he does not believe that there is a link between advertising and con-

If it feels good, do it in moderation

Reading University, is a renowned specialist in drugs, human performance and the biochemistry of behaviour. He is the author of several books, and his many advisory roles include that of assisting the World Health Organization.

Arise was set up in 1989. "I was fed up with negative messages, scare stories and media propaganda, such as how Christmas can damage your health," explains Warburton. "Enjoyment contributes to health, and healthy people who know how to enjoy life often live longer." In other words, moderate doses of pleasurable substances keep depression at bay.

"Depression reduces immunity, increases the risk of infection and promotes stress, which may contribute to cancer," explains the professor. He believes individual perception of what gives pleasure influences the way we function.

Stress is more
dangerous to health
than the occasional
cigarette or piece
of chocolate.
Clare Thomson
speaks to a scientist
who says enjoying
life can help you
live longer



After the preaching: practising the virtues of indulgence

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sumption. "Tobacco advertising has been banned in Iceland for years, but there is still a very high rate of smoking in that country." His view is that advertisers are simply seeking to maintain their market share. "People are perfectly capable of seeing through what politicians say, so why assume they can't see through advertisers too?"

The Brussels workshop was scheduled to coincide with the publication of a Mori (Market and Opinion Research International) poll based on telephone interviews with more than 1,500 adults in Britain, France, Germany, Italy and Spain.

Most of those interviewees said they derived the greatest everyday pleasure from family life, reading, holidays and friends. Similarly, the most popular ways of coping with stress are taking a hot bath or shower, reading, watching television and physical exercise. Yoga comes last. National differences suggest that among the populations surveyed, the British rate sex the lowest and alcohol the highest.

According to Warburton, the results confirm that pleasure-giving products such as coffee, alcohol, chocolate, tea and cigarettes play a large role in people's lives and in the ways they cope with stress. Moreover, responses reveal that most people are responsible and do not need health activists or government bodies telling them what to do. He attacks the very use of the word addiction. "For a start, doctors do not agree on what constitutes addiction. It is a dangerous word since it may be used as an excuse by people who over-indulge."

During the workshop, Canadian Professor John Luik attacked "the recent emergence of neo-puritanism and health paternalism." He claimed that they threaten "liberal democratic consensus about the legitimacy of individual choice with respect to pleasure."

Arise's philosophy can all too easily be misinterpreted. Warburton has had plenty of dealings with the media. "Once a journalist wanted to take a photograph of me holding a bottle of brandy in one hand and waving a cigar in the other." The BBC even cancelled an interview with him. "They said that all I was doing was speaking common sense. It simply was not interesting enough." The message may be obvious, but Arise believes it is lost in a sea of puritanical dos and don'ts.

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